

ON THE
ADVANTAGES
WHICH RESULT FROM
CHRISTIANITY;
AND ON THE
INFLUENCE
OF
CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES
ON THE
MIND AND CONDUCT.

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L O N D O N :

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THE Substance of this Discourse was delivered in several Sermons at Sunbury, Middlesex, more particularly at the last Anniversary Meeting of two Friendly Societies of poor tradesmen and day-labourers in that parish, instituted for their mutual support, in cases of sickness, accident, or old age; and it is now enlarged and published, with a view to diffuse, more widely, religious sentiments and moral principles among those who have little leisure for the study of Theological subjects.

The Author's object, in referring the Reader to so many texts of Scripture, is, to make him more conversant with the Sacred writings; to strengthen and confirm his faith; and to enable him "to give a reason for the hope that is in him*." He therefore recommends it to those readers, whose instruction he has principally in view, to peruse this Discourse at least twice; the second time always referring, or causing some one in their families to turn, to the texts: And he hopes that the impression they make upon them, will never be effaced.

* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

Sunbury,
April 3, 1799.

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ON THE

ADVANTAGES

WHICH RESULT FROM

CHRISTIANITY, &c.

EPH. v. 8. *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: Walk as children of light.*

THE religion, which our blessed Lord came to establish, has unquestionably enlightened the world, by revealing several important truths, which are unattainable by the best efforts of human wisdom. Christianity is distinguished from all other systems of religion, by the sublimity of its doctrines, the excellence of its laws, and the superiority of its motives.

In an age, therefore, when too many are inclined to shut their eyes against that divine "light," which our Lord came to diffuse, it may be useful to consider,—The doctrines which he has revealed;—The precepts which he has inculcated;—and, The information which he has given, concerning the future destination of the human race.

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These are not only very important, but very extensive subjects : all I propose to do is, to give a compendious view of them, in order to remind you of those principles and duties, which you have had frequent opportunities of hearing explained and enforced, at greater length, from this place.

But, before I proceed to the discussion of these topics, it may not be improper to premise, that the style of Scripture is highly figurative ; and that this mode of diffusing knowledge, so prevalent among oriental nations, and in early ages, was calculated to make the deepest impression on the mind, and was well adapted to the genius and manners of the people, to whom the sacred writings were originally addressed. Objects of sense are often used to represent the qualities of the mind. Thus, in the metaphorical, impressive, and sublime, language of Scripture, *light* frequently denotes a state of knowledge and virtue ; and *darkness*, a state of ignorance and vice *. Hence, the Christian dispensation is emphatically styled, by St. Peter, “ a marvellous “ light †,” to denote its transcendent purity and excellence ; and, perhaps, no other image could so perfectly represent it to us.

The figurative expression, then, in the text, is intended to convey to us some idea of the ignorance, or spiritual “ darkness,” of mankind, before they were illuminated by the celestial beams of divine truth, and enjoyed the inestimable blessings, which we derive from the “ light” of Christianity.

* Rom. xiii. 12. 1 Thess. v. 4, 5. Luke i. 79. John iii. 19.

† 1 Pet. ii. 9.

It may also be observed, that, about the time of our Saviour's appearance on earth, there was a general expectation of the Messiah *, who was to effect a most astonishing change in the manners, sentiments, and religious knowledge of mankind. Accordingly, the principles which he taught, of the perfections and providence of God, of the nature and duties of man, and of a future state of existence, were such as were unknown, even to the most celebrated writers of Greece and Rome; such as naturally led to, and could not fail to produce, a great improvement in the human condition. His doctrines, so wisely adapted for the instruction of the world, and so admirably illustrated by his example, made a happy change in the temper, the condition, and the views of the primitive Christians. From being ignorant, idolatrous †, sensual, and dissolute, they became, on a sudden, enlightened, pious, temperate, and virtuous. This wonderful change is expressed by the strongest figures of speech, as becoming "new men ‡," and "new creatures §;" and as passing from "darkness to light ||;" from a life of ignorance and depravity, to religious knowledge, to moral "goodness, righteousness, and truth ¶."

Now, though *we* enjoy the advantages of revelation, and have been instructed in those principles of religion and virtue, which tend to improve our hearts, and to civilize our manners; yet, let it never be forgotten, that every nation, unenlightened by Christianity, has been, and still continues to be, involved in deplorable

* Luke ii. 25, 26, 38. Luke iii. 15. Mark xv. 43. John vii. 40, 41.

† Acts xvii. 16. 22—31. Rom. i. 22, 23. ‡ Eph. iv. 24.

§ 2 Cor. v. 17. || 1 Pet. ii. 9. ¶ Eph. v. 9.

ignorance and superstition, and addicted to the most savage customs, and immoral practices. At Ephesus, for instance, where the magnificent temple of Diana once stood, and where vast numbers of devotees came to offer sacrifice at her famous shrine *; and in Phenicia, where Ashtaroth was worshipped †; we find that idolatry, and great dissoluteness of manners, were prevalent. Hence the Apostle of the Gentiles, with peculiar force and propriety, reminded the Ephesians of that wretched state of heathenism, irreligion, and vice, into which they had formerly been sunk; and of that glorious state of knowledge, virtue, piety, and salvation; of that spiritual peace, and those eternal blessings, vouchsafed to them, and to us, by the goodness of God, and through the merits of a Saviour. “Ye were formerly darkness; but now ye are light in the Lord: Walk as children of light ‡.”——
Let us,

I. Consider some of the doctrines, which Christianity has revealed. The Christian religion teaches us, that

* Acts xix. 24—28. 35. Eph. iv. 17—19, and Eph. ii. 1—3.

† Judges ii. 13. Judges x. 6. 1 Kings xi. 33.

‡ The Eleusinian or other heathen mysteries, which were here probably alluded to, seem to have depraved the morals of the initiated, and were communicated under the suspicious colour of secrecy; hence they are justly termed, in verse 11, “works of darkness.” But the doctrines of Christianity have an opposite tendency: they enlighten our minds, meliorate our manners, and give us the highest ideas of the nature, the perfections, and the government, of the Deity. *Behave, then, as persons enlightened by Christianity: Let your principles appear, by the purity and lustre of your lives.*

all things were originally created, and are still governed, by that gracious and holy Being whom we adore *, and who is possessed of infinite knowledge †, power ‡, wisdom §, and goodness ||. It gives a most amiable and sublime description of all his perfections, but especially of his goodness; of which there is the most transcendent display. The beneficence of God is indeed diffused over all his works ¶. You may trace it in the productions of nature, in the structure of the universe, in the government of the world; but, above all, in the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ **.

The great design of Christianity is, confessedly, to recover and redeem the human race from a state of moral depravity; and to prepare them, by a renovation and progressive improvement of their nature here, for a higher and more perfect state of existence hereafter ††.

To effect this purpose, so worthy of God, and so beneficial to man, our Lord came and dispelled the clouds of ignorance and error ††; taught the most beneficial doctrines; and explained on what terms we may hope for pardon and eternal life §§,—and by what means our moral improvement may be promoted, and our final happiness secured.

* Gen. i. 1. Acts xiv. 15—17. Psal. cii. 25—27.

† Prov. xv. 3. Psal. cxxxix. 1—12. Jer. xxiii. 24.

‡ 1 Chron. xxix. 11. § 1 Tim. i. 17.

|| Psal. ciii. 11—17. James i. 17. ¶ Psal. cxlv. 9. 15—19.

** John iii. 16, 17. †† Luke xix. 10. Rom. iii. 23.

Gal. iv. 4, 5. Col. i. 13. 1 Pet. i. 3—5.

‡‡ Acts xxvi. 18; and iii. 26. §§ Acts iiii. 19; and x. 43. Matth. xix. 16—21.

He came also for *another* great end : to render the exercise of mercy consistent with the other attributes of the Deity ; to make atonement for sin ; and thereby to wash away the stain of moral guilt *. Had our Lord's assumption of human nature been solely for instruction, a subordinate being might have answered all the purpose. But the Scriptures assure us, that he came for a higher design, to which every human being was inadequate : *he* came to be " the propitiation for our " sins †." Accordingly, he is represented under two distinct and illustrious characters, as a Teacher, and as a Saviour.

In order to make this appear, let it be observed, that our religion, equally friendly to the interests of mankind, and to the wishes of enlightened reason, has clearly instructed us in those great and important duties, which we owe to God, to our fellow-creatures, and to ourselves. We are called upon, by the most powerful motives, to attend to its doctrines and precepts, and to endeavour, at all times, to regulate our lives by the pure and benevolent principles which it inculcates ‡.

Let it also be observed, that, to the devout mind, Christianity appears to be a stupendous dispensation of mercy, gradually revealed, and ultimately terminating in the redemption of the world §. As " the wages of " sin is death," so it shews, that " the gift of God is " eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord ||." It inculcates love to our Creator ¶ ; faith in our Re-

* 2 Cor. v. 21. Matt. i. 21. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

† 1 John ii. 2. Rom. iii. 25. ‡ Rom. ii. 7—11.

§ 1 John iv. 9, 10. || Rom. vi. 23. ¶ Matt. xxii. 37.

deemer ;

deemer *; and an habitual dependence on the influence of God's Holy Spirit †. It forms our minds to gratitude, humility, and devotion.

With this view, it has given us a concise and comprehensive form of prayer ‡, highly adapted to our wants, and proper to be used in all our addresses to the throne of grace and mercy. Every morning and evening we should thank God for our existence, our powers, and faculties; for all the blessings of this life, and all our hopes of a better. We should implore his pardon for all our offences, and should pray for his gracious assistance to enable us to discharge the several duties of our station. We should solicit the continuance of his mercy and protection, and beg of him to bestow on us what is good, and to preserve us from evil.—Amidst the various occupations of life, you have, all of you, time to offer up a short prayer, or a silent ejaculation to him; and thus you may cultivate and preserve a devout temper of mind §; and live under an habitual sense of the divine presence and inspection. This would guard you against vice; and would dispose you to act with propriety in that station, which Providence has wisely assigned you ||. And, among other advantages, it would deter you from the impious practice, which some have, of cursing and swearing in common conversation ¶; or of ever daring to use God's sacred name, but with impressions of the most profound veneration and awe.—Let God, then, be worshipped in

* 1 John iii. 23. Acts xvi. 30, 31.

† Rom. viii. 26, 27. 1 Cor. xii. 4—6.

‡ Matt. vi. 9—13.

§ Acts x. 1, 2. Col. iv. 2. || Phil. iv. 6, 7. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

¶ Matt. v. 34—37. James v. 12.

all your families, and his name hallowed ; that is, honoured, revered. And, to cherish pious emotions, and to encourage your devotion, you need only be reminded, that the Lord is nigh unto all that “ call upon him ; yea, all such as call upon him in truth *.”

Whoever attends to the excellence and singular nature of Christianity, will perceive, that it is an astonishing display of God’s “ eternal purpose †” for man’s salvation, and that it is the noblest subject of contemplation, in which the human mind can be engaged. It elucidates and enforces the law of nature, and impresses us with the importance and necessity of revelation ‡. From revelation alone we see the love of the Father, the intercession of the Son, and the influence of the Holy Spirit §, all combining to effect the gracious plan of our redemption ; though in a manner which, from our finite conceptions, we cannot thoroughly understand. For the comfort of those, who feel the imperfections and depravity of their nature, and earnestly implore the Divine assistance, we are taught, that God’s holy Spirit will illuminate their minds, invigorate their resolutions, and assist their endeavours, in the conscientious discharge of all moral and religious duties. This doctrine, which Christianity has clearly confirmed ||, is our great consolation amidst the various difficulties incident to a state of trial.

* Psal. cxlv. 18. James v. 16. † 2 Tim. i. 9, 10. 1 John v. 11.
‡ Rom. viii. 3. § 2 Cor. xiii. 14. 1 Pet. i. 2.
Eph. ii. 18.

|| John xiv. 15—19 ; xvi. 13. Luke xi. 13. Phil. ii. 12, 13.
1 Cor. x. 13. Tit. iii. 5. Gal. v. 22, 23.

Let it be farther considered then, that the Gospel is peculiarly calculated to afford proper encouragement and relief amidst the external distresses, and internal sorrows, of human nature. Though the offer of salvation was indiscriminately made by our Lord to all ranks of men, high and low, rich and poor; yet, as was predicted of him *, it was to the illiterate and indigent he chiefly addressed his discourses †. Accordingly, Christianity is particularly described as a dispensation of “glad tidings to the poor ‡;” to “the poor in spirit §,” in external circumstances, and in religious knowledge. And, what is a very material consideration, it is evidently designed to alleviate the burden of human woe, and to shew that God is disposed to help and relieve the distressed ||.

It is well known, that, notwithstanding all the recent discoveries of science, the works of Nature are but imperfectly explored; and their properties not sufficiently investigated, by the researches even of the most learned and inquisitive philosophers ¶.—In the same manner, with respect to some of the articles of the Christian faith, it need not excite our wonder, that there should also be mysteries, which are inscrutable to human wisdom. Nor, with the imperfect and limited faculties which we enjoy, can it be urged as an objection to revelation, that we are unable to fathom “the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of the Most

* Isa. lxi. 1. † Mat. xi. 25. 1 Cor. i. 26. James ii. 5.

‡ Luke iv. 18. § Matt. v. 3.

|| 2 Cor. i. 3, 4. Psal. x. 17, 18. Psa. xviii. 6. Psal. xxii. 4, 5, 24, 26. Psal. xxxiv. 6. 10. 17—19. Psa. lxviii. 5. Psal. lxxii. 12. Psal. cii. 17. Psal. cxlvi. 6—9. ¶ Psal. civ. 24, 25.

“High;

“ High *; of him “ who is, and who was, and “ who is to come——the Almighty †.” The fall of man—his redemption from sin—the efficacy of our Lord's death and intercession—the doctrine of repentance and remission of sins—the influence of Divine grace—the rejection of the Jews for a time ‡—the admission of the Gentiles into the Christian church §—the resurrection of the body—the immortality of the soul—and the certainty of a future and eternal state of retribution :——These, these are the great and momentous truths, which the Apostle might well call “ the mysteries, which had been hid from ages and “ generations; but were then made manifest by the “ appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ ¶.” These evangelical doctrines, which unassisted reason could never have discovered, are powerful motives to a religious life; their obvious tendency being, to promote reverence for the principles of the Christian faith, and to enforce the duties of our respective stations.

In proof of the divine religion which we profess, many striking evidences might be adduced from *prophecy* ¶; from the accomplishment of various remarkable events, which, through a long series of ages, had been predicted, but which could not be foreseen by the greatest human sagacity.—It may also be remarked, that the stupendous and well-attested *miracles* which our Lord wrought, and the power which he displayed,

* Rom. xi. 33.

† Rev. i. 8.

‡ Matt. xxi. 43.

§ Psal. ii. 8. John x. 16. Acts. xi. 18. Eph. iii. 5, 6.

¶ Col. i. 26, 27. Eph. i. 9, 10. 1 Tim. iii. 16. 1 Cor. ii. 7.

¶ Luke xxiv. 26, 27. 44—47.

in confirmation of his divine mission and character *, were the accomplishment of those predictions, which relate to the birth †, the life ‡, the doctrines, the death §, the resurrection, the functions of the Messiah ; and to the beneficial tendency of his religion. But on these sublime and extensive subjects, though they be most pleasing and consolatory to the human mind, we cannot enter at present.

It ought, however, to be observed, that, amidst the various predictions in the Old and New Testament, there are none, perhaps, which call for, and merit a more serious and devout attention, than those that relate to the Jews—to their dispersion ||; their final re-

* Luke iv. 16—21. John xx. 30, 31. John i. 45. Matt. xi. 2—6.

† Isa. ix. 2, 6, 7. Isa. vii. 14. Luke i. 26—38. Matt. i. 18—25. John i. 14.

‡ Compare here some of the prophecies of the Old Testament, with our Lord's history in the New. Compare Isa. xxxv. 5, 6, with Luke vii. 19—23 ; Isa. xlii. 1—4, with Matt. xii. 14—21 ; Zech. ix. 9, with Matt. xxi. 1—9, and John xii. 12—16 ; Psal. lxxviii. 2, with Matt. xlii. 34, 35 ; Isa. xxviii. 16, and Psal. cxviii. 22, with Matt. xxi. 40—44, Acts iv. 8—12, and 1 Pet. ii. 6—8.

§ Compare Isa. xl. 11, with John x. 11 ; Zech. xi. 12, 13, with Matt. xxvii. 3—10 ; Zech. xii. 10, with John xix. 34. 37 ; Psal. xxii. 1. 8. 16—18, with Matt. xxvii. 45. 43. 35 ; Psal. xli. 9, with Mark xiv. 17—21, and John xiii. 18, 19 ; Isa. liii. 3—5, with Matt. viii. 16, 17 ; Isa. liii. 7, with Matt. xxvii. 12. 14 ; Isa. liii. 9, with Matt. xxvii. 57—60 ; Isa. liii. 12, with Mark xv. 27, 28 ; Isa. l. 6, with Matt. xxvi. 67 ; Psal. lxix. 21, with John xix. 28—30 ; Isa. liii. 10, 11, and Psal. xvi. 10, with Acts ii. 24—32, and Acts xiii. 26—39 ; Psal. lxxviii. 18, with Eph. iv. 7, 8 ; Psal. cx. 1. 4, with Matt. xxii. 41—46, and Heb. v. 5, 6.

|| Jer. xxiv. 9. Deut. iv. 26, 27, Deut. xxviii. 28, 29. 35, 37.

storation to Palestine, the Holy Land * ; and their conversion to Christianity †. Whoever will carefully examine the prophecies relative to the Jews, as recorded, at different times, by the sacred writers, and compare them with their political constitution, and civil history—still a distinct and separate people—still in a state of depression and infidelity—and still adhering to their religious institutions, their laws and ceremonies, their language, their customs, and their manners ; for many ages dispersed over the whole face of the earth ; without any form of civil polity, without any permanent establishment, and their city, Jerusalem, with the holy temple, totally destroyed ‡ : whoever, I say, will carefully and candidly compare the prophetic declarations, so clear, so express, and so exactly verified by past events, must be struck with reverence and amazement ; must have an incontrovertible proof of God's moral government of the world, and of the authenticity of Christianity, to which the Jews are to be converted ; and must acknowledge, that nothing ever occurred in the history of mankind, that can be compared to the wonderful events which have happened to that peculiar people, who were once the favourites of Heaven, and are still reserved to manifest the councils, the justice, and the mercy, of the Most High.

* Zech. viii. 4—8. Ezek. xx. 33—44. Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16. 28, 29. Ezek. xi. 16—20. xxxvi. 24—36. xxxvii. 1—14. 21—28. Ezek. xxxviii. 14—23. and xxxix. 1—7. 23—29. Jer. xxiii. 3, 4, 7, 8.

† Rom. xi. 15, 25, 26. 2 Cor. iii. 14—16. Mal. i. 11.

‡ Hof. iii. 4. Micah. iii. 12. Matt. xxiii. 36—39 ; and Matt. xxiv. 1, 2. Luke xix. 41—44. Luke xxi. 24.

I might also take occasion to remark, that the Arabs, as well as the Jews, are a striking and living evidence of the veracity of the Old Testament. How astonishingly have the predictions, recorded in the patriarchal history, concerning Ishmael, been verified in his posterity, the wild and rapacious Arabs! “He will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him *.”

But I shall only add, on the subject of prophecy, what is an animating consideration to a benevolent mind, that the intercourse already opened, and still increasing, between the different nations of the earth, and the consequent diffusion of knowledge, are paving the way for the reception of Christianity, and the civilization of mankind; when “all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of Christ †;” and “all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him ‡.”

Christianity teaches, that there are angels and good spirits, who do God’s will in heaven, and are “ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation §.” And, it leaves us no room to doubt the existence and agency of an insidious and malignant spirit, who seduced our first parents ||, and still works, not only “in the children of disobedience ¶,” but assails the minds even of good men, and is an enemy to their virtue and hap-

* Gen. xvi. 12. See also Gen. xxi. 18. 20, 21.

† Rev. xi. 15. ‡ Psal. xxii. 27.

§ Heb. i. 14. Matt. vi. 10. Matt. xviii. 10. Psal. ciii. 20. Luke i. 19. Dan. iii. 28. Rev. vii. 11.

|| Gen. iii. 1—19. 2 Cor. xi. 3. 1 John iii. 8. Heb. ii. 14. Rev. xii. 9. Matt. xxv. 41. ¶ Eph. ii. 2.

piness *. From the same unerring authority we learn, that the kingdom of "darkness" is to maintain, for a while, a violent struggle against the kingdom of "light;" but that the power and influence of Satan will gradually diminish, as the benevolent genius of Christianity displays itself, and true religion prevails †.

It is proper also to observe, that the gospel teaches us, not only to resist the seductions of the devil ‡, but to be aware of the temptations of the world §, the contagion of bad company ||, and the evil propensities of our own hearts ¶. Thus surrounded every where by dangers and difficulties, let us, from a due consciousness of our own weakness, earnestly pray, that God would assist us in our passage through this life, and deliver us from the various snares and enemies which we have to encounter **. When we are about to leave the world, and all its delusive scenes, we shall see the vanity of those pursuits, which appear, at present, of such vast importance; and of those contentions, and animosities, which so frequently disquiet and embitter human life ††.

As a matter of the most serious concern to us all, it is repeatedly and pointedly urged by the sacred writers, that "there is a day approaching, in which "the

* Matt. xiii. 19. 38. 39. Matt. iv. 1. 11. 2 Cor. iv. 4.

† Dan. vii. 13, 14. 27. Matt. xvi. 18. Rom. xvi. 20. Luke x. 17, 18. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 8, 9. James iv. 7. Eph. vi. 11, 12. 16.

§ 1 John ii. 15—17. Rom. xii. 2.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 33. Prov. xiii. 20.

¶ Matt. xv. 19, 20. James i. 14. Prov. iv. 23.

** 1 Cor. x. 13. 2 Pet. ii. 9. †† Luke x. 41, 42.

“ heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the
 “ elements shall melt with fervent heat * ;” when “ the
 “ dead, both small and great, shall stand before the
 “ tribunal of Christ † ;” when the Son of Man, in-
 vested with his Father’s glory, shall come with his an-
 gels, and recompense every one according to his ac-
 tions ‡ ; and when “ the wicked shall go into eternal
 “ punishment : but the righteous into eternal life § .”
 Such grand and awful representations, which the Scrip-
 tures give us, of the dissolution of the world, of a
 future judgment ||, and of man’s final destination,
 are wisely designed to prepare us for so tremendous a
 scene, by an habitual government of the heart, and re-
 gulation of the conduct. But, to the consideration of
 a future state, a topic, of all others, the most inte-
 resting to us, we shall again have occasion to revert.

Allow me, however, to call your thoughts here to
 an event, which is fast approaching to us all, and will
 prove of the same effect with “ the day of judgment.”
 Christianity often reminds us of the shortness and un-
 certainty of life ¶, of the instability of human events,
 and of that awful period, when we shall enter into
 “ the valley of the shadow of death **,” and shall be
 removed to another world ; where we shall be rewarded
 “ according to the deeds done in the body, whether
 “ good or bad † †.” This sentiment, which the Chris-
 tian revelation perpetually inculcates, and the voice of

* 2 Pet. iii. 10—14.

† Rev. xx. 12. Rom. xiv. 10.

Acts xvii. 30, 31.

‡ Matt. xvi. 27.

§ Matt. xxv. 46.

|| Matt. xxv. 31—46.

¶ Luke xii. 20, 21. James iv. 13—15. 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.

** Psal. xxiii. 4.

†† 2 Cor. v. 10.

nature loudly proclaims, cannot but touch every considerate heart. How careful should it make you to guard against every vice ; to cultivate every virtue ; and to improve the time, which cannot be recalled ! Your fathers have answered the wise purpose of Providence in their creation, and are now laid in the dust * ; and, when *your* time of trial is concluded, you will follow them. “ Watch, therefore ; for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man cometh †.”

As this life is a state of moral probation for fallen and degenerate creatures, it accounts for that mixture of happiness and misery, of virtue and vice, which prevails in the world ; and for that imperfect and unequal distribution of good and evil, at which we are too apt to repine. You all know that God has entrusted us with various talents ‡, and requires us to improve them by employing our time, our substance, our faculties, and our influence, in advancing his glory, and the happiness of our fellow-creatures. This is a point of so much importance, and, it is to be feared, so little regarded, that it may be proper, on this occasion, to press it more particularly upon your attention.

Were I to take a survey of man, through the different regions of the globe, and trace the various gradations of religious knowledge, from the total ignorance of the mere savage, through a gradual progression, to the African, the Indian, and the Mahometan, till we ascend, at last, to the enlightened Christian, enjoying the blessings of revelation, and of civilized

* Zech. i. 5, 6.

† Matt. xxiv. 42. 44.

‡ Matt. xxv. 14—30. 2 Cor. viii. 12.

life, you would be deeply impressed with the superior excellence of Christianity, which has conveyed the most important information to man; and has introduced the most beneficial changes into the state of society.

While the untutored Indians live in ignorance of the great doctrines of religion, and have only the dictates of uncultivated reason, and the suggestions of natural conscience, to regulate their conduct, you, my brethren, enjoy peculiar blessings, both civil and religious, for which you must be accountable. Enlightened by the principles of Christianity, and animated with the hopes of future existence, you have daily opportunities of improving in piety and virtue, and are enabled to perform all those great and essential duties, which your various stations and occupations in life require. "Let your light," then, "so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven*." Though this scriptural injunction be particularly applicable to those, who are raised to eminent situations, and whose sphere of duty, and of usefulness, is proportionably increased; yet the influence of every man's example is much greater than perhaps may be imagined. It is true, most of you are in humble stations, and cannot make great progress in the pursuits of science, or the acquisition of knowledge; but, amidst the common incidents of life, you should remember, that you may all be mild and peaceable, forgiving and obliging, inoffensive and pure in heart. God has made you, no less than the rich and the great †, susceptible of virtue, of the comforts

* Matt. v. 16.

† Prov. xxii. 2.

of society, and of the pleasures of devotion. He has bestowed on you the same freedom of action, and of sentiment; the same light of reason, the same sense of rectitude, the same hope of heaven. And he has blessed you with health of body, peace of mind, domestic harmony, and that share of religious knowledge, which may support you through a laborious life, and conduct you to a better world.

Though a distinction of rank is essential to the existence of society, yet, let it ever be remembered, that you are all equally responsible to Providence for the blessings you enjoy; that the Governor of the world is attentive to the part you are now acting; and that the condition of the virtuous peasant, or industrious mechanic, is more respectable, and more happy, than that of the man, however wealthy, or however elevated his station, who is enslaved to sensual appetites and criminal luxury, and inattentive to religious and moral obligation *. — By frugal industry, peaceable manners, conjugal fidelity, and the influence of religion, you and your families live contented and happy in your cottages, and are useful in the world; but, you may be assured, that this would be far from being the case, if you neglected the proper duties of your station, if you degraded your nature by immoral practices, and if you were not humble, benevolent, and upright, in private life. Ever, then, cultivate innocence, virtuous “simplicity” of manners, and “godly sincerity †;” and guard against drunkenness ‡, founess

* Isa. lvii. 20, 21. Isa. xxxii. 17. Mark x. 24, 25. Luke xvi. 19—25.

† 2 Cor. i. 12.

‡ Luke xxi. 34. Prov. xxiii. 21.

of temper, and party-disputes. Remember, that Christianity inculcates supreme love for God *, and cheerful contentment with your lot †; represses undue solicitude respecting earthly treasures ‡; and directs you to aspire after the splendours of another world, designed for you in the realms of eternal "light" and peace §.

In considering the doctrines of Christianity, it cannot but occur, that, in the Mosaic ritual, the Hebrew believer was burdened with a multiplicity of rites and ceremonies. But the dispensation of the Gospel, that last and most perfect revelation of the divine will, has introduced a more rational, sublime, and spiritual mode of worship ||. — Our Lord has instituted only two simple and solemn ordinances, which are extremely significant, and highly proper to represent some of the great truths of the Christian faith. By baptism, we are admitted into the church of Christ; and by sprinkling the body with water is emblematically represented that cleansing of the soul from vice, that regeneration or change of nature, and that purity of heart and life, without which, our Christian profession will be of no avail ¶. — And, by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, under the familiar but expressive symbols of bread and wine, we are reminded of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which result from it; we see the moral turpitude of sin; and are impressed

* Luke x. 27. † 1 Tim. vi. 6—8. Heb. xiii. 5.

‡ Matt. vi. 19—21, and 24—34. 1 Pet. v. 7. John. vi. 27.

§ Col. iii. 1, 2. || John i. 17. Heb. viii. 6.

¶ Matt. xxviii. 19. Acts ii. 38. Tit. iii. 5. 1 Pet. iii. 21. Rom. vi. 3—6. Heb. x. 22. John iii. 5.

with a deep sense of the divine goodness in our redemption *.

On this subject you require frequent admonition. "As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye shew forth the Lord's death till he come †." The word *oft* clearly implies frequency; a constant habit of partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, whenever you have an opportunity. The participation of this ordinance has been the uniform, uninterrupted practice of Christians, of all ranks, from the Apostolic age down to the present day; and this custom will no doubt continue till the end of time. For it has a tendency to produce sentiments of contrition for past offences; piety to God; gratitude to our Redeemer; and charity and forgiveness towards all men. It is a grateful acknowledgment to God for all his mercies, but especially for effecting the salvation of the world by the death of his Son. It is a public avowal before our Maker, to our own consciences, and in the sight of man, that we believe that "Jesus Christ is the Messiah, who was to come into the world ‡."—You are bound by duty, by gratitude, and by self-interest, to commemorate our Lord's death; and I hope that these powerful considerations will excite you to attend to this subject with unprejudiced minds; will guard you, for the future, against gross misconceptions of the nature and design of this divine institution, and against an habitual neglect of so clear, and so positive an injunction of our religion; and, in short, will induce you, in the spirit

* Matt. xxvi. 26—28. Luke xxii. 19, 20. 1 Cor. xi. 23—25.
John vi. 51, 53, 54.

† 1 Cor. xi. 26.

‡ John xi. 27.

of piety, and of benevolence, to partake of this sacrament, whenever it is administered.

In all our approaches to the throne of God, we are now taught, that it is the temper and disposition of the mind, and not our external circumstances, which he regards *; and that true religion consists, not in sacrifices, which were, in their own nature, inefficacious to wash away the stains of moral guilt †; but in a pure and pious heart ‡; or, to use the language of the prophet, in “doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God §.” “The High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, dwelleth also with him, that is of an humble and contrite spirit ||.” “The prayer of the upright is his delight ¶.” Through the merits and intercession of the Messiah, it cometh before him as incense; and the lifting up of the hands, as the evening sacrifice **.

Here it deserves our particular notice, that, in these words, there is an obvious allusion to the daily sacrifices prescribed by the law of Moses. Indeed, unless we have some knowledge of the instituted means of “drawing near to God,” under the Jewish dispensation, and of the various victims, festivals, rites, and ceremonies, which it enjoined, it is impossible to see the beauty, or even to understand the meaning, of many important passages in the Bible: and particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where a comparison is drawn

* John iv. 24. James i. 27. Psal. xxvii. 6.

† Heb. x. 1—4. Heb. vii. 19. Heb. ix. 9. Isa. i. 17—17.

‡ Psal. xxiv. 3—5. Hos. vi. 6. Mark xii. 33.

§ Micah vi. 8. || Isa. lvii. 15. ¶ Prov. xv. 8.

** Psal. cxli. 2.

between the Law and the Gospel; and in other parts of the New Testament, where the “ spiritual sacrifices” of adoration, prayer, and praise, are required, as “ acceptable to God through Jesus Christ *.”

We find that sacrifices have been offered in divine worship from the earliest times †, and have constituted part of the religious observances of almost all nations, however remote and unconnected with each other. But they seem not to have been rightly understood among the Heathens ‡. On the contrary, it plainly appears from history, that they perverted the minds of the people, and turned them from purity of heart, and sublimity of devotion, to the external and ceremonious part of worship; substituting the form for the sub-

* 1 Pet. ii. 5. Matt. v. 23, 24. Heb. xiii. 16.

† Gen. iv. 4, compared with Heb. xi. 4; Gen. xxviii. 20—22.

‡ The classical scholar needs not be informed, that, among the Pagans, sacrifices were not offered to God, to that unoriginated, eternal, immutable, and infinitely perfect Being, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, of whom they were ignorant; nor did they worship that apostate angel, who is termed in Scripture, *the devil, the adversary, the evil one, the prince of the power of the air, the god of this world*. According to the maxims of their theology, their devotions were addressed to *demons*; that is, to the ghosts or spirits of men deceased, whether good or bad; to beings whom, in consequence of their useful inventions or great achievements, ignorance and superstition had deified after their death, but who were far subordinate to the supreme Object of adoration. This illustrates a noted passage of the Apostle Paul, who affirms, 1 Cor. x. 20, that “ the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to *demons*, “ *δαίμονας*, and not to God.” Hence that worship, which was originally addressed, and is only due, to the Supreme Being, was gradually transferred to the luminaries of heaven, and ultimately to the symbolical figures, and hieroglyphic representations of heathen divinities, which became the objects of popular adoration, and proved an inexhaustible fund of mythological fictions.

stance

stance of religion; giving degrading ideas of the Deity, and producing a corresponding corruption of manners.

Among the Jews, however, they were better understood, being offered to the true God, and explained by their Prophets and Teachers. They seem originally to have been either appointed, or permitted by Providence, partly as an act of thanksgiving and acknowledgment from man, that all the good things he enjoyed were the gifts of his Creator: but principally to point out and prefigure that great atonement which Christ was afterwards to make for the sins of mankind. In an illiterate age, and among the Jews, a people prone to idolatry, and accustomed to a worship of great and splendid ceremonies, sacrifices were doubtless intended to inspire men with sentiments of gratitude and reverence for the Maker of heaven and earth; and to promote sanctity of heart and life *. They consisted of three kinds, eucharistical, propitiatory, and expiatory: it may be useful to explain them to you. *Eucharistical* sacrifices were offered to God in the fervour of devotion, and were designed to express gratitude and praise, for benefits already received. Thus, when Noah quitted the ark, in which he and his family were saved from the deluge, “ he
“ built an altar unto the Lord; and, taking of every
“ clean beast, and of every clean fowl, he offered
“ burnt-offerings on the altar.” And, as those oblations were offered with a cheerful and grateful mind, we are told that God was pleased with this proof of his gratitude and piety †.—In the same manner, *propiti-*

* Exod. xii. 5. Levit. i. 3.

† Gen. viii. 20, 21.

atory sacrifices were designed, either to implore the continuance of the divine blessing, or to avert the divine wrath. We have a striking instance of this sort, at the dedication of Solomon's temple, when, with peculiar solemnity, "the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord," with a view of invoking his favour, and of impressing their minds with sentiments of gratitude, love, and devotion, to the supreme Object of all worship *.

And, in the method of making atonement for sin, according to the law of Moses, we see the nature and design of *expiatory* sacrifices †. With the deepest contrition did the Hebrew worshipper here acknowledge his imperfections and guilt, deprecate God's wrath, and confess that he deserved the death, which was to be inflicted on the victim. Expiatory sacrifices consisted of the offerings of animals, which, by the appointment of Heaven, were acceptable for appeasing the wrath of God, and for obtaining his pardon and mercy, when accompanied with penitence, through faith in the future Sacrifice of the Messiah, to which all the sacrifices from the fall bore a reference ‡. Hence the Passover, the most distinguished of the Jewish festivals, and at first instituted to commemorate the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage §, was designed also by Providence to be typical of the death of Christ ||; and to shew that, "without shedding of blood, there was to be no remis-

* 1 Kings viii. 62.

† Heb. ix. 11—15.

|| 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

† Lev. xvi. 20—22. 30—34.

§ Exod. xii. 26, 27. 29.

“ sion of sins *.” On the great day of atonement, this solemn festival was to be celebrated annually among the Jews, until the time of our Lord’s crucifixion; when, by the Sacrifice of himself once offered, for the expiation of human guilt, sacrifices, having accomplished their end, were for ever abolished †.

We know from Scripture, that the sacrifices, instituted in the Jewish church, were principally intended to prepare the world for the reception of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity; to prefigure the death of Christ; and to shew the efficacy of that great Sacrifice, in procuring the redemption of mankind. Hence, our Saviour is frequently called “the Lamb of God ‡;” “the Lamb slain,” in effect, “from the foundation of the world §.” “Ye were not redeemed,” says St. Peter, “with corruptible things—but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb, without blemish, and without spot—that your faith and hope might be in God ||.” The redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, is that grand and extensive plan of Providence, which runs through the whole Bible. Of this sacred doctrine, which the “light” of Nature had imperfectly suggested, we have many obvious traces, and significant allusions in the Old Testament ¶; and it is most clearly revealed by Christ and his Apostles

* Heb. ix. 22.

† Heb. ix. 26. x. 10. 12. 14.

‡ John i. 29.

§ Rev. xiii. 8.

|| 1 Pet. i. 18—21.

¶ Gen. iii. 15. Gen. xxii. 18. Gen. xlix. 10. Deut. xviii. 15. Psal. lxxii. 17—19. Isa. xl. 1, 2, 9. 11. Isa. xlii. 6, 7. Isa. xlix. 6. Isa. lii. 7. Isa. liii. 4—6. Isa. lxi. 1—3. Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. Dan. vii. 13, 14. Dan. ix. 24—27. Hag. ii. 7. 9. Zech. xiii. 1. &c. &c.

in the New *; where it is constantly inculcated, that “there is one Mediator between God and man †,” by whose death and intercession our sincere, though imperfect services will be accepted.—“Through him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God ‡;” ever remembering, that God requires a religious mind, and that the best sacrifice, which we can offer to our Maker, is a pious and virtuous life §.

To promote the interests of Christianity, and of civil society, and to improve the energy of the mind, the Scriptures farther instruct us, that, while you are to be employed six days in discharging the arduous duties of your station, you are to devote the seventh to the worship and service of Almighty God; and to the acquisition of those moral and religious truths, which raise in the heart a due veneration for the Deity, and will best fortify you against those loose principles, and vicious practices, which so much prevail.

It will be admitted, by every serious and well-informed mind, that all the knowledge, which the labouring classes of the people have of God and religion, may principally be attributed to the wise and humane institution of the Sabbath, to those occasional cessations from the toils of life, which God has, in great mercy, enjoined; and that their civilization, their improvement, and chief comfort, may be traced to the blessed opportunities, which they thereby enjoy, of comparing

* John xiv. 6. Luke xxiv. 45—47. Acts iv. 12. Acts xiii. 38, 39. Eph. i. 7. Eph. v. 2. Col. i. 13, 14. Heb. vii. 25. 1 Tim. i. 15. 1 John ii. 1, 2. 1 John iii. 5, 8. 1 Pet. ii. 24. Tit. ii. 14. &c. &c.
 † 1 Tim. ii. 5. ‡ Heb. xiii. 15.
 § Psal. li. 17. Rom. xii. 1.

their actions with the rules prescribed in the Bible; of contemplating the works of Creation and Redemption; of withdrawing their attention from the business and cares of life; of reflecting on a future state of existence; and of improving their nature, in order to be rendered “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light *.” — “Remember,” therefore, “the Sabbath day to keep it holy †.” Remember, that the sacred truths, which are then inculcated, are admirably calculated to promote piety, benevolence, and contentment, among the various ranks of society; that they afford the greatest comfort in prosperity, as well as under the unavoidable afflictions of life ‡; and that they will never fail, through the Divine blessing, to make a lasting impression on those, whose minds are not pre-occupied with other and less important objects. In an age, in which every method is employed to propagate doctrines subversive of the peace of society, and even to make men believe, that there is no God, no Providence, and no future state, you ought to be thankful, that you and your children are taught those great doctrines and duties of the Gospel, which tend to counteract such pernicious and gloomy principles; and that you are blessed with that religious information, which may make you “wise unto salvation §.”—I beseech you then, never, under any pretence, mis-spend that most precious portion of your time in intemperance and vice, in idle amusements, in convivial meetings, or in the pursuits of worldly gain ||.

* Col. i. 12. Ezek. xx. 12.

† Exod. xx. 8.

‡ Matt. xi. 28—30.

§ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

|| Isa. lviii. 13, 14.

As a further inducement to maintain steady and consistent characters, it may not be useless here to add, that, wherever the genuine doctrines of Christianity are neglected, that neglect will produce impiety, dishonesty, and dissoluteness of manners. But, if the essential principles of religion and morality are inculcated and imbibed, the gloom of ignorance will be gradually dispelled; the love of truth, of virtue, and of devotion, will increase; liberal and useful arts will be cultivated and advanced; and a further reformation in the manners, the views, and the morals of mankind, will take place. Deeply is it to be lamented, that many of the lower ranks of society still continue in gross ignorance; it is, however, to be hoped, that a time will come, when Parochial Schools will be established, and proper means used, to disseminate, more effectually, the principles and the practice of piety, probity, benevolence, and sobriety, among the rising generation. In the mean time, it is earnestly recommended to you, as you value your children's happiness, to use your utmost efforts to give them such a degree of knowledge, and especially of religious knowledge, as will tend to check the progress of ignorance and immorality; will qualify them for fulfilling the duties of their station *; and will prove a great comfort to you in the decline of life.

From this general view of the fundamental articles of our Christian belief, you will be able to understand, that the merciful intention of our Lord's mission was, to enlighten the understanding, and improve the heart;

* Prov. xxii. 6.

to give us just notions of God's providence, and moral government; to reclaim us from vice, and its fatal consequences; to teach us for what important purposes we were sent into the world; to unfold the mysteries of redemption, the nature and laws of his kingdom, and the causes and consequences of his sufferings and death *; to explain to us how we may obtain the pardon of sin, and the inestimable gift of eternal life and happiness; and, at last, to die for the salvation of mankind †.

A revelation, then, that explains to us the nature of God and man; that opens to us the great plan of Providence in the administration of the world; that renders the duties of religion more easy ‡, and obvious to the lowest capacity; that dispels the clouds of "darkness" and error, in which human nature was enveloped; and that exhibits "the riches both of the wisdom and goodness of God §;" I say, such a revelation must be highly useful and beneficial to us.

Now, from all this it follows, that the doctrines of Christianity, from their peculiar importance and sublimity, claim your most serious regard. But, for farther information about them, let me again intreat you, whatever may be your rank in life, to go regularly, every Sunday, to the place appropriated to divine worship; to attend to those solemn calls to devotion, and

* Matt. xvi. 21. Matt. xvii. 22, 23. Matt. xx. 17—19, 28. Matt. xxvi. 28. Mark ix. 9, 10. Mark xiv. 24. Luke ix. 30, 31. John iii. 14, 15. John xiii. 8.

† 1 Cor. xv. 3. 2 Cor. v. 15. 1 Tim. ii. 6.

‡ 1 John v. 3. § Rom. xi. 33.

religious instruction * ; and to study to be among the number of those devout Christians, who, as our Saviour terms it, in “ an honest and good heart, having “ heard the word, retain it, and bring forth fruit with “ perseverance †.”

And let me earnestly recommend, on that sacred day, a careful perusal of your Bible, and especially of the New Testament. On all occasions adhere to it as the grand rule, which should form your Christian faith, and regulate your practice. Read it with serious and candid minds ‡, and thereby endeavour to imbibe the spirit of genuine piety. This will gradually instil into your hearts the love of God, and the love of man §. It will effectually guard you against a desperate unconcern about your future state; and will not only increase your religious knowledge, but prove to you a source of joy, of hope, and of consolation.——Having now shewn some of the principal doctrines of Christianity, let us, next,

II. Consider some of the practical duties which it enjoins; and which cannot fail to carry irresistible conviction to an unprejudiced mind. And first: if we examine the moral precepts of the Gospel, we shall find, that they contain a system of the most pure, the most sublime, and the most perfect morality, which can be conceived. Indeed, no precept can be found in the New Testament, that is not adapted to our progressive improvement and final happiness, and condu-

* Heb. x. 25. Deut. xxxi. 12. Matt. xvii. 20. James i. 22.

Psal. v. 7.

† Luke viii. 15.

‡ John v. 39.

§ Matt. xxii. 37—40. 1 John iv. 21.

cive to the most important interests of society. They all breathe that heavenly spirit of universal benevolence, by which the Christian temper may be distinguished. They are perfectly consonant to the best sentiments of human nature; and, were we all regulated in our conduct, as we ought to be, by the laws of Christianity, many of the troubles of life would be removed; and this world would become a comfortable passage to a better. In confirmation of these remarks, we are to observe, that Christianity teaches us, that we are all the offspring of the same Heavenly Parent, and therefore commands us, "*as we have opportunity,*" "to do good unto all men *," whatever may be their religion, their rank, or their country.

Further: let us consider the beneficial tendency of our religion to promote the interest, the order, and the peace of society. "*Do to others, whatever you might reasonably expect them, in like circumstances, to do to you †.*" This is the sacred law which it gives you, to direct your daily conduct, in all your intercourse with your fellow-creatures. Now, this evangelical principle, deeply impressed on the mind, will prompt you, at all times, to alleviate the afflictions, and to promote the happiness, of mankind. It will guard the rich against tyranny and oppression; and the poor against turbulence and discontent. It stimulates men to virtuous industry, and warns them against that pride and insolence, that idleness and dishonesty ‡, those civil dissensions and intestine commotions, which

* Gal. vi. 10.

† Matt. vii. 12. Luke vi. 31.

‡ Prov. xi. 1. Prov. xx. 10.

are the source of so many crimes, and of so much misery *.

In the next place, with a view to render mankind virtuous and happy, the Christian religion enjoins veracity in our words, honesty in our dealings, and adherence to our promises. It exhorts us, to put away "all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil-speaking, "and malice †;" and, instead of these malignant passions, which disturb our peace, it recommends "mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, "forbearance, brotherly affection, and charity ‡." It is likewise designed to influence and direct our general conduct; it teaches that, even in the most common actions of our lives, "whether we eat or drink, or "whatever we do," we are to do all in such a manner as may tend "to the glory of God §." It particularly impresses our hearts with the necessity of benignity, of true Christian love, that "bond of perfection ||," without which we are told, that all our endowments, whether of body or of mind, are, in the sight of God, of no value ¶. And it shews us, what Christians should never forget, that diversities of opinion, in religious sentiments, or in modes of worship, should not be the cause of intolerance, persecution, or alienation of affection **; and that, although we may not all join in the same religious service, yet we should all unite in mutual forbearance, and in the same Christian charity.

* Matt. xii. 25. † Eph. iv. 31. ‡ Col. iii. 12—14.

§ 1 Cor. x. 31. Col. iii. 17. || Col. iii. 14.

¶ Matt. vi. 14, 15. See also St. Paul's incomparable description of benignity, 1 Cor. xiii.

** Luke ix. 54—56. Rom. xiv. 4. Matt. xiii. 29, 30.

These great principles of religion have had considerable influence on the laws and customs, the minds and manners, of those nations, who have received them; they have rendered them more mild and merciful, and have even mitigated the natural calamities of war. We may easily trace their blessed effects, in treating captives with humanity; in gradually abolishing slavery; in promoting civilization, good government *, and useful knowledge; and in establishing many excellent charities, for the instruction of the ignorant, and the relief of the indigent. If the time would admit, we might expatiate on these topics, with peculiar pleasure. But it may be only necessary to remark, that the principles of Christianity, by their mildness and humanity, have, in some measure, softened and corrected that ferocity of temper and degeneracy of morals, which are the effects of ignorance and irreligion; and have already diffused, among the most enlightened and civilized nations, a benevolence of heart, a gentleness of manners, and a regard to the rights of humanity, totally unknown before the promulgation of the Gospel. Banish these Christian principles from the world, and the greatest misery and disorder would inevitably ensue; but, as they prevail, they advance the peace and comfort of society, and bring forward that happy period, which should be the subject of our daily prayers, “when nation shall not lift up their sword against nation, nor shall learn war any more †;” when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea ‡.”

* 1 Pet. ii. 13—17. Mark xii. 13—17.

† Isa. ii. 4.

‡ Isa. xi. 9.

And here it may not be improper to observe, that, to the benevolent spirit of the Gospel, you whom I am more particularly addressing, may attribute the institution and flourishing state of your Friendly Societies, so honourable to your characters, and by which your condition is so considerably improved. Now, it always affords me great satisfaction to observe your prudence, and your philanthropy, in thus appropriating a certain portion of your earnings to the comfort and relief of the sick, of the lame, and of the aged members of your society; and in making a proper provision, while you are young, and in health, to secure yourselves and your families from the painful humiliation of a parish-maintenance*. And, I am persuaded that, while some are indolent†, improvident, and fraudulent, and thereby bring a disgrace on themselves, and on their relations, you all feel a peculiar pleasure in carrying your contributions to the fund of the Society‡; in affording relief to the honest, the unfortunate, and the helpless; and thereby in supporting an independence of spirit, and a benevolence of nature, which you should ever maintain. If Providence continue to bless you with health and employment, you will feel grateful to him, that you have not required any relief; and, if any of you should linger long on a bed of sickness; and be incapacitated by disease, or debilitated by age, it will be a great alleviation of his affliction to know, that he and his family will be properly taken care of by his friends and neighbours, without be-

* 1 Tim. v. 8.

† Prov. xxiv. 30—32. Prov. vi. 6—11. Prov. xiv. 23.

* 1 Cor. xvi. 2. Acts xi. 29.

coming a burden on the public; and that, when he dies, he will be buried decently at the expence of the Society, and a small sum given for the relief of his widow and orphans.—From the beneficial effects already produced by your Societies *, it is much to be wished, that these useful institutions may be generally established, and that your good example, in this respect, may have an extensive influence among the lower ranks. For this purpose, and in order to confirm and augment the stability of the Societies, let me remind you, as I cannot do it too frequently, of the importance and necessity of harmony, good humour, sobriety, and a strict observance of your Rules, at all your meetings; otherwise your Societies cannot flourish, nor can you expect the Divine blessing on your endeavours. Amidst that diversity of sentiment, which generally prevails in large societies, let me also admonish you, to preserve unity of affection; to cultivate gentle and obliging manners; and to adhere strictly to the grand philanthropic object of your institution †. And let your own experience of distress ever prompt you to feel for, and to sympathise with, the distressed of others.

It deserves next our most serious attention, that it is the duty of every Christian to apply himself to such useful occupations as are suitable to his rank. Religion, so far from encouraging habits of indolence, expressly enforces diligence, and requires you to provide, by honest means, for yourselves and families ‡. Its

* See the Author's Religious and Philanthropic Tracts, p. 63—71.

† 1 Cor. i. 10. 2 Cor. xiii. 11. 1 Pet. iii. 8. 9.

‡ 2 Thess. iii. 10—12.

obvious tendency is, to promote domestic affection and public welfare. From a principle of piety, we are enjoined to perform all relative duties with vigilance and assiduity, according to our respective stations, and circumstances in life.

In this and in the following chapter, from whence the text is taken, the reciprocal duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, and of masters and servants, are explained with great clearness and precision. The married state is to be observed with all fidelity and sanctity; and, that it may be happy, we are taught, that the husband must treat his wife with affection and tenderness, and the wife behave with submission and respect to her husband*.—Children are to honour their parents, to shew them every mark of regard, to obey all their lawful commands, and to assist them in distress. And parents are to treat their children with kindness and natural affection, to give them a Christian education, and to train them up in early habits of piety, virtue, and industry†.—Servants, or day-labourers, are enjoined fidelity and obedience, not merely from worldly motives, but as being under the constant inspection of God, by whom their conscientious services will be rewarded. “Servants, be obedient to
“ your masters, doing service as to the Lord, and not
“ to men ‡.” On the other hand, masters are required to behave with lenity and humanity to their servants;

* Eph. v. 22. 25. 33. Matth. xix. 3—6. Col. iii. 18, 19. Tit. ii. 1—5. 1 Pet. iii. 1—7.

† Eph. vi. 1—4. Col. iii. 20, 21.

‡ Eph. vi. 5—8. Col. iii. 22—25. Tit. ii. 9, 10. 1 Pet. ii. 18—20.

to shew a tender concern for their temporal and eternal interests; and are reminded, that “ they also have a “ Master in Heaven,” to whom they are responsible *.

In like manner, men of every rank and condition have their respective duties distinctly enjoined; and should endeavour, as far as they are able, to fulfil the wise purposes of Providence in their creation. Those who are placed in the higher stations of life are bound, by the laws of Christianity, to revere God, to administer justice, to avoid oppression and dissoluteness of manners themselves, and to check them in others; to encourage industry and virtue, to instruct, civilize, and improve mankind, and, by condescension and beneficence, to diffuse general happiness †.

By the same principles, the inferior ranks of society are required to shew gratitude and respect for all the favours they receive from their superiors, to obey their lawful commands, to be frugal and industrious, to suppress the emotions of envy and discontent, of violence and fraud, and to discharge, with cheerfulness and fidelity, the important functions of their humble station ‡.

From hence we learn that, as Christians, and as members of society, we must cultivate a peaceable, a candid, an affectionate, and humane temper. This temper is, in fact, the grand pillar on which public order, domestic comfort, and internal tranquillity, all

* Eph. vi. 9. Col. iv. 1.

† 1 Tim. vi. 17—19. Psal. lxxxii. 1—4. Jer. xxii. 3. Lev. xix. 15.

‡ Rom. xiii. 1—7. 1 Pet. ii. 13—17. Prov. xxiv. 21. Tit. iii. 1, 2.

rest. And what highly concerns us, to rectify our principles of action, and to form this disposition of mind, should be the primary object of our attention, amidst the various transactions of life.

So that the man, who is either guilty of fraud or dishonesty, injustice or oppression, unkindness or inhumanity, is violating some of the clearest and most important laws of Christianity. The duties which it enjoins are, indeed, a most striking and incontrovertible evidence of its authenticity. If Christianity be of Divine origin, you must all be sensible, that it will enforce good principles, and prohibit every thing that is cruel and immoral. "The wisdom which is from above," is delineated with such peculiar qualities as cannot be mistaken. In its principle, "it is," says St. James, "pure and peaceable;" and, in its effects, "full of mercy and good fruits*." Christianity, then, contains nothing repugnant to the dictates of conscience, that "candle of the Lord †," that mental "light," which God has given you to govern your practice, and to discriminate between moral good and evil.—Let me beseech you, therefore, seriously to consider, whether you possess that temper of mind, that piety towards God, and that integrity towards men, which the Gospel expressly requires. This is a momentous consideration to you all. For, be assured, that a neglect of these duties is incompatible with your Christian profession; that, if you are sincere in your religious principles, they will have a visible influence on your life and conduct; and that many evils may be

* James iii. 17.

† Prov. xx. 27.

avoided,

avoided, if you follow the Apostle's exhortation, and "study to be quiet, and mind your own business*."

As some of those who are now my hearers are employed in the care and management of cattle, we must not omit to remark, that they should always guard against any cruel treatment of them, and should recollect what Solomon says, that "a righteous man regardeth the life," and is not inattentive to the comfort, "of his beast†." Unnecessary severity, even to the brute-creation, is a token of a hard and unfeeling heart, and therefore it is highly proper to caution you against it.—Remember, then, that the great and benevolent Author of Nature, whose Providence extends over the immense range of creation, will certainly punish you for every act of wanton cruelty, inflicted on the least or meanest of his creatures.

With regard to the duties which we owe to ourselves, Christianity inculcates sanctity of heart, by teaching, in the strong, figurative language of the Apostle, that our bodies are the "temples of the Holy Ghost‡;" and that, if we would not resist the influence of that Spirit, we must avoid every impurity, which, in this state of moral probation, they are liable to contract. Now, we all know, that we are prone to gratify our irregular desires, which are the most frequent disturbers of our tranquillity. We should, therefore, endeavour, by God's grace, to govern our thoughts, our tempers, and our passions; and to cultivate sobriety, temperance, modesty, and chastity§.

* 1 Thess. iv. 11.

† Prov. xii. 10.

‡ 1 Cor. vi. 19. 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

§ 1 Cor. ix. 24—27. Rom. xiii. 12—14.

This duty of self-government certainly tends to restrain our turbulent passions, and to improve our minds in virtue. But it must be confessed, that this abstinence from immoral practices, and criminal pleasures, is a most arduous task. This sanctity of heart, however, this purity of manners, this regularity in private conduct, is what Christianity expressly enjoins*; and is, perhaps, one of the most convincing and unequivocal proofs of the sincerity of our Christian principles.—Let us carefully guard, then, against those vicious habits, those sensual passions †, which pervert the judgment, and debase the moral faculty; and study, through Divine assistance, to be sober, chaste, and modest. And, having “exceeding great and precious promises” made to us in the Gospel, let us endeavour to rectify our inward disorders, and to “cleanse ourselves from all “pollution of the flesh and spirit,” with the view of “perfecting holiness in the fear of God ‡.”

But, though these heavenly duties are strongly inculcated in Scripture, though they are approved by the dictates of every unbiassed mind, and though they are enforced by the most powerful sanctions, yet, alas! such is our natural weakness and depravity, we often feel a conflict between virtuous principles and vicious affections; an inclination impelling us to evil, contrary to our clearest judgment, our firmest resolution, and, what we know to be, our highest interest. This propensity to vice and folly is termed, by the Apostle,

* Tit. ii. 12. Gal. v. 19—21. 24. Rom. xii. 1.

† 1 Pet. ii. 11. 1 Cor. vi. 18. 1 Thess. iv. 3.

‡ 2 Cor. vii. 1. 2 Pet. i. 3.

“ a law in our members warring against the law of our minds, and bringing them into captivity * ;” and this is the unhappy state, to which even the best men are frequently reduced, by the infirmity of human nature, and the prevalence of temptation. When a Christian is conscious, that he has thus done wrong, and is anxious to return to the path of duty, blessed be God, he is happily freed from those doubts and disquietudes, which, without the aid of revelation, agitate the thoughtful, though penitent mind, about the means of forgiveness; and which, among other expedients, led men, in all ages, to hope for the expiation of sin by a strict observance of ritual services, and by the oblation of the richest, propitiatory sacrifices †.

Another consideration, which deserves here to be mentioned, is the heavenly example which our Saviour, at all times, displayed. We all feel, that human nature is far from being perfect. A life, free from every stain and imperfection, was never exhibited, but by that ineffably great and Divine Person ‡, who has revealed the most important truths, and may, in a peculiar manner, be styled “ The light of the world §.” His whole life was adorned with the most exalted piety, the most perfect benevolence, and the calmest

* Rom. vii. 22, 23.

† Micah vi. 6—9. Mark xii. 33. Acts x. 43. 2 Cor. vii. 10. Rom. iii. 24, 25.

‡ Isa. ix. 6, 7. Isa. xl. 9—11. John i. 1—3. 14. John viii. 56—58. John v. 22, 23. John xvii. 5. Matth. ix. 6. Matth. xxviii. 18. 20. Philip. ii. 6—11. Col. i. 15—19. Col. ii. 9. Heb. i. Rev. i. 8. 18. Rev. v. 11—14. &c. § John viii. 12.

resignation.

resignation. Though he endured the greatest poverty, persecutions, and sufferings, yet he always submitted to the will of Providence, and never uttered the least complaint *. When we compare his conduct, and his sentiments, with the greatest and most amiable character which history records, we find a singular difference. In him, we always see a dignity of sentiment, a superiority of power, of wisdom, and of goodness, which distinguished him from all human beings; and shewed him to be divine †. In his duty to God, we behold the most fervent devotion ‡; and, in his conduct to man, that disinterested and extensive beneficence which so eminently marked his whole life, and is peculiarly worthy of gratitude and admiration §. In short, his character, as delineated by the Evangelists with inimitable beauty, is exactly such as might be expected on a supposition, that there is another world, of which he had the clearest knowledge and conviction. It proves, beyond all doubt, that “he came from God” to instruct, to redeem, to reform the human race; and to prepare them for that heavenly kingdom, which consists of “righteousness, and peace, and spiritual joy ||.”

It is true, you cannot, as he did, restore the dead to life ¶: you cannot feed four or five thousand people

* 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

† Matth. xi. 3—6. John iii. 2. John vii. 46. Luke xxiv. 32.

‡ John iv. 34. Matth. xiv. 23. John xvii. Heb. vii. 26.

§ 2 Cor. viii. 9. Acts x. 38. John xv. 13. Rom. v. 8. 10. Matth. viii. 20. John x. 14—18. || Rom. xiv. 17.

¶ John xi. 1—45. Luke vii. 11—15.

with a few loaves and fishes *: you cannot still those boisterous and unruly elements, the winds and the waves † : nor can you, in an instant, cure the most inveterate diseases by the utterance of a word ‡. These, and other astonishing miracles, recorded in the Gospel-history, are beyond the reach of human power §. But, in his piety to God, and his benevolence to man; in his patience and humility, in his mildness and gentleness of manners, in his kindness and forgiveness to enemies ||, and in all the other graces of his Divine character, you are called upon to imitate him; and, as far as human frailty will permit, to have “the same mind in you, “ that was also in Christ Jesus ¶.”

Now, what a sublime idea does all this give us of the benevolence of the Deity, in thus enlightening, improving, and perfecting human nature; and in gradually raising us to that happiness which was forfeited by the fall? What a stupendous proof of the divine benignity is here exhibited in our redemption! and how should it excite in our breasts the warmest sentiments of love, gratitude, and devotion! Examine, with candour and attention, the doctrines and precepts of the New Testament, and you will not find, that any of them are contrary to our natural sentiments of God, or to the best wishes of the human heart. No: They all tend to the glory of God, and to the real good of man;

* Matth. xv. 33—38. Matth. xiv. 20, 21.

† Matth. viii. 26, 27. Psal. cvii. 21—30.

‡ Luke iv. 38, 39. Luke vi. 6—10. Matth. viii. 5—13.
John v. 1—9. Matth. ix. 20—22. § Mark vi. 2.

|| Luke xxiii. 34.

¶ Philip. ii. 5.

and they all shew, in a striking light, the beauty, the excellence, and the importance of Christianity.

The speculative unbeliever, indeed, aiming to exalt human reason, may reject the authority, and deny the necessity of revelation. The hypocrite may flatter himself, that a strict observance of some duties of religion may compensate for the violation, or habitual neglect, of others. The enthusiast, mistaking the effusions of a warm imagination for Divine operations, may wait for extraordinary impulses of the spirit, to guide him into truth. And the profligate, who perpetrates the most atrocious crimes in society, may endeavour to weaken his belief of a future existence, and to reject a religion, which denounces the most severe and lasting punishment on his daring wickedness*. But the great truths of Christianity, as they are displayed in the New Testament, in their native purity and “simplicity †,” are so consonant to reason, and so congenial to the human heart, that no efforts will ever be effectual to make a Christian renounce the clearest principles of religion and morality, and the animating hope of eternal life ‡.

Thus far, then, you see, from the clear and amiable views that the Gospel has given us of the Supreme Being, and of the relation in which we stand to him, and to each other, in what sense, and in what way, the great Author of our religion has enlightened the world, by the doctrines which he has taught, and

* Matth. xxv. 46.

† 2 Cor. xi. 3.

‡ John vi. 66—69.

by the precepts which he has inculcated. — Let us now,

III. Consider the momentous information, which he has given us, about the future destination of the human race. And, let it here be observed, as an extraordinary fact, that, though men may differ in capacity, in character, and in civilization; yet, perhaps, there has not been discovered a single nation, however savage and barbarous, either in ancient or modern times, where the belief of a state of future rewards and punishments has been totally extinct. We find, however, that those, who only enjoyed the “light” of nature, had many doubts and perplexities on this interesting subject. It is true, there is a principle in the human heart, which shudders at the idea of annihilation, and leads men to entertain some notions of a future retribution; but it is revelation alone that removes every apprehension about it, and offers to the humble, the pious, and the penitent, a recompense infinitely greater than this turbulent world can bestow; a reward not commensurate to their services, but to the riches of Divine grace, “through the redemption that is in Jesus*.” For, “eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the human heart” to form any adequate conception of the happiness, which “God hath prepared for those who love him†.”

As many of you are engaged in agriculture, and other rural occupations, and have constant opportunities of observing the progress of vegetation, and the great

* Rom. iii. 24. 2 Tim. i. 9.

† 1 Cor. ii. 9.

change.

changes it undergoes, it may be proper to call your attention to part of the Apostle's beautiful strain of reasoning, in proof of a resurrection. Observe, then, this wonderful, though common process in the vegetable world. When a grain of seed is sown, and buried in the ground, it seems to undergo a total dissolution, and to lose all power of renovation; but the great Author of Nature, by the secret and unknown laws of vegetation, makes it revive, and shoot forth with renewed vigour*. Now, this analogy of nature is no less astonishing to the learned than to the illiterate; and is a striking indication of a resurrection, and of a higher destination, which the Gospel gives us reason to expect†. When the human body dies, and is mouldered into dust, God, who is omnipotent, can and will, in his own time and manner, raise it to a perfect, a spiritualized, and an eternal life‡.

The resurrection of the body, and a future state of rewards and punishments, are peculiar and fundamental articles of our religion. Christianity expressly informs us, that there will be a resurrection of the "dead, both of the just and unjust§." It has, therefore, dispelled those doubts and uncertainties, in which the human mind was involved, and gives good men the surest hopes of a happy immortality. The suggestions of reason, aided by the "light" of revelation, are sufficient to produce the strongest conviction. Accordingly our Lord, who, with great sublimity, called himself "The resurrection and the life||," gave several striking

* John xii. 24.

† Philip. iii. 21.

|| John xi. 25.

† 1 Cor. xv. 35—38. 42—44.

§ Acts xxiv. 15. Gal. vi. 7.

and incontrovertible evidences of this most important and essential truth, by raising, not only others, but even himself, from the dead *. In allusion to these astonishing miracles, he announces with authority, that “ The hour is coming, when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth : they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of condemnation †.” What a glorious, yet awful assurance is this ! Well might it be said, that “ life and immortality are brought to light through the Gospel ‡.”

* Mark v. 35—42. Matth. xxviii. 1—6. Acts xxvi. 22, 23.

† John v. 28, 29.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 10. The word φωτισαντος, which is here translated “ brought to light,” more properly denotes, in this place, “ made clear.” Φωτίζειν, from φως, light, signifies to enlighten, to make known, to illustrate, to throw light upon. Thus, John i. 9. ὁ φωτισὲν πάντα ἀνθρώπον, who enlighteneth every man ; where the Evangelist applies this passage to the Messiah, emphatically called by him, το φως το αληθινον, the true light. Thus, also, Eph. iii. 9. Καὶ φωτισαὶ πάντας, et omnibus præluere, and to make all men see, or understand ; where the Apostle refers to the mystery, or secret, which had been concealed from ages and generations,—that God would call the Gentiles, and receive them into his church,—but was, soon after the Christian æra, revealed to the Apostles, to be by them promulgated to the world.—The same expression occurs in 1 Cor. iv. 5. and is applied to our Lord, ὁς καὶ φωτισεῖ, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and lay open the “ counsels of the hearts.” And, in like manner, Arrian, in Epietet. i. 4. ἀληθεὶς φωτίζειν, to elucidate the truth. This will serve to explain the import of φωτίζω, and the meaning of the Apostle : Both Jews and Gentiles had an imperfect knowledge of a future state ; but the important doctrine of “ immortal life,” which was formerly obscure, and of the “ resurrection of the body,” of which they had no conception, “ is now made clear through the Gospel.” 1 Cor. xv. 44. 50—54.

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The New Testament, beyond all doubt, has given a more express assurance, a more open display, of a blessed immortality, than any former revelation had ever done. But surely, in the Old Testament, there are not wanting several strong intimations of another life, and that man will not have the same final destiny with the brutes. I shall only mention two passages. One is taken from the prophecy of Daniel, and is so clear and explicit, that it requires no comment. "Many," says he, "that sleep in the dust shall awake; some, to everlasting life; and some, to shame, and everlasting contempt*." The other passage is taken from the book of Exodus, where God manifested himself to Moses under this gracious title: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob †;" and it is so well illustrated by the conversation, which took place between our Saviour and the Sadducees, that I shall avail myself of the "light" he has thrown upon it.

The Sadducees, who denied the immortality of the soul, or its existence after death ‡, came to him with a view to embarrass him, and to overthrow all the arguments that could be adduced, either from reason, or from Scripture, in favour of a future state. But, though they came to him with such an insidious design, as it was a matter of the last importance, he condescended not only to solve the difficulty which they had started, but, at the same time, gave the most sublime idea of the happiness of Heaven. "The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage.

* Dan. xii. 2, 3.

† Exod. iii. 6.

‡ Acts xxiii. 8.

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“ But they,” says he, “ who shall be accounted worthy
 “ to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the
 “ dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage. Nei-
 “ ther can they die any more, being children of the
 “ resurrection. Ye, therefore, greatly err, not know-
 “ ing the Scriptures, nor the power of God *.” “ Not
 “ knowing the Scriptures,” ye conclude that the doc-
 trine of a future state is not contained in them, as ye
 have overlooked it ; and, not considering “ the Divine
 “ power,” “ ye think it an incredible thing, even that
 “ God should raise the dead †.” But the future world
 will be constructed very differently from the present.
 And, in effect, Moses shewed that there would be ano-
 ther life, when he called the Lord who appeared to
 him, “ the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and
 “ of Jacob,” long after those Patriarchs were crum-
 bled into dust. For certainly, he cannot be called the
 God of those, whose existence terminated with this
 life ; but the God of those, who, though removed
 from this state of trial, still worship and serve him, and
 are in a happier and better world.

And thus we see, however some of the Jews might
 overlook, or misinterpret, the doctrine of a future
 state, it appears that it is implied and supposed in the
 Old Testament ‡. The Author of the Epistle to the
 Hebrews assures us, that faith has been the leading
 principle of the wisest and the best of men from the

* Matth. xxii. 29. Luke xx. 27—40. † Acts xxvi. 8.

‡ Luke xvi. 31. See also Gen. v. 24, compared with Heb. xi. 5 ;
 2 Sam. xii. 23. Eccles. xii. 7. 14. Job. xix. 25—27. Psal. xvi.
 10, 11. Psal. xvii. 15. Psal. lxxiii. 24—26. Isa. xxv. 8. Isa. xxvi. 19.
 Isa. lvii. 1, 2.

earliest times ; that they believed in the promises of a Messiah ; and that they looked for “ a better and a “ heavenly country *.”

Assisted by the “ light” of the Gospel, we can behold Abraham, the father of the faithful, and “ Lazarus in his bosom †,” in a world of bliss, adorned with the beauty of holiness and immortality, and reposing under the protection of the Almighty. And, if we be actuated by the same pious and humble spirit, we shall, in God’s good time, be removed from a scene of sorrows and difficulties, and translated to a state of perfect and endless happiness ‡.

A Christian, then, has the greatest reason to rejoice, that his views are not confined to this short and precarious state of existence §. Amidst all the poverty and afflictions, the pain and sickness, which may have befallen him, his mind is animated with the hope of a blessed resurrection. Amidst the most depressing calamities, he sees a more serene and enlivening prospect, where he shall have “ an inheritance, incorruptible, “ undefiled, and that fadeth not away || ;” and where there shall be neither “ death, nor sorrow, nor pain ¶.”

Take away the firm belief of a wise and good Providence, that governs the affairs of the universe ; convince a man, that this life is the whole of his existence ; that he is a wretched pilgrim, abandoned to the caprice of chance and fortune, in a vale of woe ; and that he has nothing to hope, or to fear, beyond the grave ;

* Heb. xi. 10. 13—16. John xi. 24. John viii. 56.

† Luke xvi. 23.

‡ Heb. xi. 8—10. Matth. viii. 11.

§ John xiv. 1—3. 2 Tim. iv. 8.

|| 1 Pet. i. 4.

¶ Rev. xxi. 4. Rev. xiv. 13.

and you will embitter his life, and rob him of his greatest comfort. Like a vessel, tossed on a tempestuous ocean, without any means to brave the storm, his desponding heart would be ready to be overwhelmed with grief and despair.—On the other hand, impress his mind with proper notions of God's perfections and moral government *; remove every doubt about his future existence; and animate him with the hope, that Providence will guide him through this mortal state †, and, at last, conduct him to a better world ‡; and he feels the most soothing consolation amidst all the trials, the losses, the disappointments, and the distresses, of human life, and looks forward, with pleasing expectation, to that happy but unknown period, when there will be a perpetual cessation of sorrow, and “all tears shall be wiped away from his eyes §.” Delightful thought! How it cheers the virtuous breast, and sweetens the bitter cup of affliction! Under every calamity of life, and even at the approach of dissolution, a good man supports himself with the reflection, that the light afflictions of mortality “will work out for him an exceeding and eternal weight of glory ||.” Though he look forwards to the trying hour, when he is to leave his disconsolate family, exposed to various distresses; yet his solicitude is removed, when he reflects, that they will be under the protection of the same heavenly Father, who has comforted him in his trou-

* Psal. lviii. 11.

† Matth. x. 29, 30. Psal. xxvii. 5. John xiv. 27.

‡ Psal. lxxiii. 23, 24. Heb. xiii. 14. John x. 28.

§ Rev. vii. 17. Heb. iv. 9.

|| 2 Cor. iv. 17. John xvi. 33. Habak. iii. 17, 18. Psal. xciv. 19.

bles; has conducted him through the various scenes of life; and has enabled him to overcome all the trials and difficulties of his probationary state *. Animated by his Christian faith †, he resigns, with composure, himself, his friends, and his family, to the protection of that Being, who, in tender compassion, hath said, “ Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God ‡.”—“ Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widow trust in me §.”

The evidence, then, of a future state, though not so displayed as to withdraw our attention from the proper business of life, is yet sufficiently powerful to elevate our minds, and to be productive of the most beneficial influence, both on individuals, and on society. The weary traveller is no longer involved in the “ darkness” of night. The “ Sun of righteousness ||” has arisen, has dissipated those clouds, which hang so thick and heavy about him, and has diffused “ light,” and knowledge, and truth. While you are depressed with poverty or affliction, you have still the animating “ hope of eternal life ¶,” and of salvation, through the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. It is this hope, and this only, that can, and *does* support the human mind, under the severest pressure of affliction, on the death of your nearest and dearest friends **, and at the close

* Psal. xxiii.

† 1 John v. 4. Luke xxiii. 46. 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

‡ Isa. xli. 10.

§ Jer. xlix. 11.

|| Mal. iv. 2.

¶ Titus iii. 7. 1 John ii. 25. Col. i. 5.

** 1 Thess. iv. 13—18.

of your own life. Amidst every trial, whether natural or moral, the Gospel affords the greatest consolation to man; and you cannot be sufficiently thankful for its important discoveries. Its benign effects, however, are, at present, but imperfectly seen. But, at the day of final retribution, its sacred influence will be visible, in having promoted the moral government of God; in having turned many millions of mankind from “darkness to light *;” in having diffused instruction, consolation, virtue, and happiness, among them; and in having trained them up, through a progressive state of religious and moral improvement, to a participation of a higher and happier state of existence, where, “that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away †.”

From some expressions of scripture we may infer, that the benefits of our Lord's death do extend, in some sense, to all men; as well to those who have been ignorant of revelation, as to those who have been enlightened by the Christian faith †. “Now,” indeed, “we see through a glass darkly §;” but, if we believe the doctrines, imbibe the principles, and practise the precepts, of his religion, we may rest assured, that his merits and intercession will procure for us a title to salvation; and that, in a future state, our views will be enlarged, our faculties improved, and we shall be permitted to have nearer access to the fountain of “light, of goodness, and of happiness ||.” Then, the

* Acts xxvi. 18.

† 1 Cor. xiii. 10.

‡ 1 John ii. 2. 1 Cor. xv. 22. Rom. vi. 23. § 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

|| Matth. v. 8. Matth. xiii. 43. 1 John iii. 2. Psal. xxxvi. 9. Rev. vii. 9—17.

moral government of God will be fully displayed ; then, all the disorders, and seeming irregularities of the present scene, will be rectified ; vice will be punished, and virtue rewarded. And then, the great work of redemption, devised by Providence from the first, will be finally completed, and will fill the minds of the redeemed with an ecstasy of wonder, love, and gratitude, which no power of language can express. “ The ransomed of the Lord shall enter into Zion with triumph ; and everlasting joy shall be on their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness ; and sorrow and fighting shall flee away *.”

After this explanation of the manner in which our Lord hath *enlightened* the world †, it only remains briefly to enforce the Apostle’s advice, and to shew the influence which these Christian principles ought to produce on your minds, and behaviour. “ *Walk as children of light.*”

In the first place, Amidst all the trials and vicissitudes of human life, let us ever thank God for the singular and unspeakable advantages which we derive from Christianity ‡ ; and let us shew our gratitude and obedience to our Redeemer, for all he hath done and suffered for the fallen race of men §. From the extensive view which we have taken of this subject, it is obvious that the Christian religion strongly enforces pious affections, and virtuous conduct ; and that our faith and life should be regulated by its doctrines and

* Isa. xxxv. 10.

† John xii. 46.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. Rom. viii. 32. 1 Tim. ii. 4.

§ Rev. v. 9—14. Heb. iv. 14, 15.

precepts *. It is the exprefs declaration of Scripture, that “ ye are not your own ; for ye are bought with a “ price” of inestimable value, even with the precious “ blood of Chrift, and are therefore” bound to employ your faculties in the fervice of God, and to “ glorify him with your body, and with your fpirit, “ which are God’s †.”

Let us endeavour, then, to please our great Benefactor ; to be ufeul in our ftations ; and to be actuated by the divine principles which we profefs. With humble and grateful hearts, let us worship and ferve God, and daily blefs him for the “ light” of revelation ‡. But, let us ever remember, that the punifhment of a poor heathen, who, in an unenlightened age, had deviated from the path of moral rectitude, will be far lefs fevere § than what awaits any of us, who, in this Chriftian country, and with fuch means of improving our nature, have “ loved darknefs rather than “ light ||,” have neglected the duties of our ftation, have perverted the gifts of Providence to bad purpofes, and, in fpite of every overture of grace and mercy, have perfifted in the ways of vice ¶.

In the fecond place, All the principles, and all the precepts of the Gofpel, concur in enforcing a fober, a virtuous, and devout life ** ; and in evincing the importance and neceffity of piety, juftice, charity, and temperance. Thofe discoveries of a ftate of immor-

* Rom. xii. 1 Tim. i. 5. 1 John iv. 11. 21.

† 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 6. Col. i. 12, 13.

§ Luke xii. 48.

|| John iii. 19. Heb. ii. 3.

¶ 2 Pet. ii. 21.

** Tit. ii. 11—14.

talities, which we enjoy, and which enable us to bear with patience the pains of disease, and the various distresses of life, naturally lead us, as moral agents, to cultivate integrity of conduct, and to prize, beyond expression, that divine religion, which removes every apprehension about our future existence.—Remember, then, that every moral duty is enforced on evangelical principles, by the most awful sanctions; and that the precepts of Christianity regulate the affections, strengthen the bonds of society, and inculcate the most sublime virtue*. Let it, therefore, be deeply impressed on all your hearts, that the design of the Christian religion, is, to promote purity of mind, and sanctity of life; and that immoral practices are incompatible with, and destructive of, the important end, for which it was revealed†.

In the third place, You cannot be too often reminded, that, as Christianity has given the animating prospect of that future and higher state of existence, towards which we are advancing, as it has established the certainty of what, to the Pagan world, could only be matter of great probability, let us endeavour to sustain our present trials with pious fortitude, and study to be conducted by the “light” of the Gospel, through this short, but unspeakably important period of our existence, to the kingdom of everlasting peace. We believe, that death is not a total extinction of our being, but a change of existence; to the righteous, it is a removal to another and better state, “where the

* 2 Pet. i. 5—8. 1 Pet. i. 15. 2 Tim. ii. 22.

† 2 Tim. ii. 19. Eph. iv. 1—3. Rom. i. 18.

wicked shall cease from “troubling, and the weary be “at rest *.”—Let us improve, therefore, our intellectual and moral nature, and thereby qualify ourselves for the happiness of a future world. Whatever is our station, whatever may be the blessings and comforts we enjoy, or the calamities to which we are exposed, let us confide in the Providence of God, and rest assured, that all his dispensations, if enjoyed with gratitude, or endured with Christian resignation, will terminate in our future and endless felicity †.

Animated, then, by the glorious hope of immortality, which the Christian religion is so peculiarly calculated to inspire, let us attend to the duties of our station, and look forwards to that happy period, when the veil, which now separates us from the future world, shall be withdrawn, and we shall partake of that “fulness of joy ‡,” which is in God’s presence for ever more; when the pious, the benevolent, and the virtuous, in every age, rank, and condition, shall meet in a better world, and for ever associate with the blessed society of angels, “and the spirits of just men made “perfect §;” when, instead of a temporal and mutable existence, we shall enjoy an eternal and heavenly state ||; when war, and tumult, and discord, shall for ever cease; and peace, and benevolence, and joy, shall actuate every breast; and when we shall be no longer exposed to the influence of criminal passions, but shall, in some degree, resemble God in his moral perfections, in his holiness, his justice, his goodness, and his truth.

* Job. iii. 17.

† 1 Cor. xv. 58. Gal. vi. 9.

‡ Psal. xvi. 11.

§ Heb. xii. 22, 23.

|| 1 Cor. xv. 49, 53. 2 Cor. v. 1.

—But,

—But, never let it be forgotten, as a matter of the most serious consideration, and awful consequence, that “ he, who hath this” blessed “ hope, should purify himself, even as God is pure *.”

The conclusion I would draw from all this is momentous beyond expression, and cannot be impressed so strongly as in the energetic words of an Apostle : “ If “ we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in “ *darkness*, we lie, and do not the truth : but, if we “ walk in the *light*, as he is in the light,” then “ we “ have fellowship with each other, and the blood of “ Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin †.”

* 1 John iii. 3. Heb. xii. 14.

† 1 John i. 6, 7.

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